Scism

By: Zapenstap

The story of individuals living in Neo Tokyo when the events of Akira went down. Gang members, debutants, churchgoers, prostitutes, foreigners, theologians and psychics...everybody questions: what is going on and what does it all mean? Unlikely to be upd

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Introduction
The city boils
Then the rain falls

The city boils

This begins like a day before the Anime does. The character casting is a little strange. It's one of those stories where everything starts out disconnected and makes perfect sense by the end, which partially explains the title. The Akira characters are more *around* than *in* the fic. I'm not writing this from their POV (maybe a little later), but how other people react to it all.

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by Zapenstap

Neo Tokyo blazed.

Glittering like a glass jewel, resplendent in the star light, though dead under a magnifying glass, the city hummed with its own peculiar energy. The flash of lights, the whir of motors, the chatter of voices, the whispers of intrigues saturated everything. Neo Tokyo heaved like a turbulent ocean, pounded like blood in the ears and bulged like an over-stuffed pillow, tearing at the seams.

It was a city about to explode.

In the airport, stranded by an overlaid flight, grad student, literary scholar and auditorium speaker Andrea Maverick stood alone and annoyed by the bus tunnels, trying without success to translate the kanji written on the walls into English. All, right. No problem. She would just have to be creative. She was shockingly independent, always had been, and she could speak Japanese a little, having a strange inborn affinity for learning languages, but she couldn't read or write a lick of it, and her speaking skills were too rusty for her to simply approach a stranger and fumble trying to ask for directions.

The only person she knew in the entire city was an old family friend from oh...years ago. But she had no idea how to find him.

She'd been traveling home from Russia to America after her speech in the embassy there about the importance of family as a center and foundation in the turbulent times following the war, but her flight had been rerouted do to some mechanical interference and she was expected to wait two days before she could reschedule her flight. Two days!

"This world's gone straight to chaos," she muttered aloud to herself in English. An old Japanese woman frowned at her, but she ignored her. The bus came and she got on. "Where the hell does this go?" she muttered as she sat down. "Does anybody here speak English?" But of course, nobody did.

"You're such a cynic," customer Ken Harold said good-naturedly to waitress Fuyumi Ishida. "Don't you believe in anything?"

"Do you harrass every waitress or just me?" Fuyumi returned as she refilled his water. "Why do you always come here and order the same thing and ask the same questions?"

"Because I enjoy it," Ken replied with a smile, noticing the way her brown eyes gleamed in the yellow lighting of the shabby restaurant where she worked fifty hours a week. "Why don't you go out with me some time?"

"I do not date customers," she said dryly. "Anything else?"

"No. I'm okay," he replied, and sighed as she nodded and made her way to the next table. Nice girl, Fuyumi. Well, maybe under all that hostility and negativity she was nice. A total cynic though. Skeptic too. But then, who wasn't these days? Especially in this city, the first to be hit by nuclear war thirty years ago.

Ken had been alive only eighteen years, the first fourteen spent in America with his Japanese mother and American father before they moved to Neo Tokyo after it was rebuilt. His parents had actually met in the original Tokyo and had planned to marry and live there, his father being a Japanese major and professional translator, but they took a trip, just a vaction, to America to meet his father's family... right before Tokyo was demolished and World War III. So they'd been forced to stay in the American midwest, and counted themselves lucky, but his father's passion for Japan eventually sent them back to Tokyo. It was strange for Ken, who had grown up American, though his homelife was extremely interlaced in Japanese, the Japanese language and culture and tastes. He felt like a foreigner in Japan, even still, but that didn't matter because he was moving back to America for college next fall anyway. It was nice being bilingual and multi-cultural, but it would be better in America were such things were common, and more useful. He didn't regret his highschool experience in Japan, not really, but he was looking forward to seeing the friends he had left behind in America, and felt a little uprooted in general.

He was going to miss eating lunch here, though, and the waitress who served it to him, even if she was a cynical little thing.

The door opened and he turned to see his highschool friend Akira Hisaishi saunter in with a disgruntled expression on his face. Ken gestured across the table from him and his friend sat down heavily. "What's up," he asked. "You look upset."

"It's all this craziness," Akira said, tossing something onto the floor with force. "The new tax law and all the rioting and the terrorism and everything. I can't tell the police from the army anymore. Everything's just crazy."

Ken didn't bother saying anything to that. There was no point. "Your brother still in that gang?" he asked instead.

Akira hung his head. "Yeah, the dumb punk. You know he's been weird since dad died, doing dope and skipping school and screwing

whores. You know how it is."

"I know how it is," Ken agreed quietly, and paused. "You still see him, Taro I mean?"

"He comes home every once in awhile, to eat and borrow money when he needs it, or steal it usually, like I don't notice. It's just that... I don't know, I never thought he'd join a gang. I guess it makes sense in a way, when it's just him and me with mom all crazy in the hospital, and I work all the time. He's gotta be lonely, but shit, I hate thinking what he might be doing, especially at night. For all I know he's out killing people, molesting girls, shit like that that will land him in prison. He should know he doesn't need to do that kind of stuff, that I'll take care of him, just as soon as I can get us out of debt."

"You want a cigarette?" Ken asked.

Akira shook his head firmly, arms lying on the table in front of him. "Nah. It won't help and I promised myself I'd quit. I've been doing pretty good these last few weeks. Haven't been drunk since October either. I guess that's something to be happy about. I don't want to turn into my dad and I'm not going to."

"Yeah," Ken said, and was quite a moment. Alcoholism ran in Akira's family. It had made his dad a monster, led to domestic violence, wildness. His mom was officially pronounced crazy and locked up in a ward, mostly from all the drugs and shit she used to do, probably because of his dad, among other things. Now his little brother, just barely sixteen, was falling to the wayside, like everybody these days. Akira himself was a gem of a guy in truth, honest, hard-working, determined to get out of his situation and take his brother with him... somewhere. "You want to come to America with me, man? I mean, it's not much better than here in some places, I guess, but in the country..."

"I don't know, Ken. I've got to pay off my debts first. Besides, what the hell would I do in America?"

"What are you going to do here? You need to get far away, for Taro if anybody, and Japan's just too small. You know he'll just run away if you move to Kyoto or somewhere."

"I was thinking more like Kagoshima, but mabe you're right. Maybe I should just go to a different country. I'm just afraid if I suggest it Taro he'll take off and I'll never see him again. It's that damn gang loyalty."

"Even if you don't say anything, you might not see him again. He could get killed tonight, or tomorrow... you know how it is."

"I know how it is."

Seeing the sad, faraway look in Akira's eyes, Ken bought his friend a drink, non-alcoholic, and changed the subject.

The rich man's wife was in a flurry of curiosity and bewilderment as she followed her husband through the halls of a trashed school. The place frightened her, even with her husband, and the idea that it frightened her annoyed her immensely.

"You can't be serious," she protested, tugging on the white leather gloves on her wrists. She tilted her head at him and blinked her eyes. "Giving so much money away! You'll put us in the poor house."

Her husband shook his head. "You don't understand, Minami," he said. "I have been sent by God to do this."

She snorted. "You are having a mid-life crisis," she chastised him. "You went to the doctor and still you went to that horrid little church and now you are throwing your fortune away. Why do you insist that you are dying? Your test results say that you are as healthy as a horse."

"Please," he said to her, stopping in the halls and grabbing her wrists. She stopped, startled at the intensity in his eyes. "Please try

to understand. It was not what the doctors said. I *know* . I know I am going to die. I just know it."

Minami muttered under her breath and tried not to feel panicked. It was a mid-life crisis, that's what it was. He wasn't dying. She wouldn't let him. She patted her hair and walked along beside him.

A shout rang through the hall and a group of boys burst through the doors across the hall and away out into another hallway.

"Slow down, Kaneda!" one boy shouted.

"Keep up, Kai! Tetsuo, did you get that..." The doors closed behind them.

Minami stood with her husband some space away, watching them with a pensive frown. "Why are we here?" she demanded of her husband.

"You have always been sad that you can not have children," he said and she lowered her eyes, clinging to his arm. "I thought maybe there was a reason, you know? Like maybe there are too many children who don't get cared for. I thought..."

"Don't tell me you want to adopt a rogue!" she exclaimed. "I thought you said you were dying? Surely you would not adopt a rogue and then leave your poor wife alone to deal with it."

He patted her hand comfortingly. "No, no. That would be too much for you, but I thought a little donation of some kind to the school, or sponsorship or scholarship..."

She frowned up at her husband, alarmed by this sudden change, this benevolence, this urgency, just realizing how real it was. She had been surprised to fall in love with a man of her status in her youth, but she had enjoyed her comfortable life with him in happiness, the money that had protected them during the war, that had allowed

them to travel away from it all, to close it all out. And now they were in the pit of hell, planning to just give it all away?

All because her husband thought he was dying and regretted his life. Or maybe it was that Theologian that was at fault! That foreign man in the church with that japanese woman who claimed to have visions and see the future. Her husband had visited that pair and came back all wild and full of energy. And then there were all those crazy occultists in the streets, proclaiming destruction and doom and death to all at the awakening of Akira. What nonsense! Her husband said the two groups were not related, that they were strongly opposed, but she did not see a difference. He was being riled up was what it was. Surely he would not die and leave her alone in this horrid little world.

"Oh, here," he said, and pushed open the door to the main office. "I called ahead, so they should be expecting us."

"I still think this is all so crazy and unnecessary," Minami muttered, but she followed him inside.

Kana replaced her reading book on the table and rose quietly as the door to the house opened and closed. She could hear her mentor hanging his coat up on the rack.

"I had another dream," she said quietly.

The Theologian appeared in the archway and crossed the room to the chair she sat in. "I know," he said.

She smiled. "It's strange, you know," she said with a smile. "I went to see Miyako today, and was barred from entering the temple."

"You should have expected it."

"I did," she said. "But I wanted to see if our visions were the same."

"They're not," he said. "They dream of the stream. It's different."

"I still dream in it," she said.

"I know." He smiled at her, "but it's different, and you know why."

"But a disaster will still befall the city," she said with conviction.

He nodded. "Akira."

"Akira," she confirmed.

Yes, this a strange story to go with a strange anime. It'll be a mix of theology, comedy... I don't know what all, but keep reading because it should be good!

Then the rain falls

I started this fic a year and a half ago and was unable to continue it because I had so many projects going at once. And then, surprise surprise, people actually reviewed it. So here I am, trying again, hopefully with better consistence! As previously mentioned, this story isn't about Akira characters. It takes place during Akira, involves Akira concepts and theology and runs parallel to the Akira plotline, but the characters are original. If you stumble over this story, be ready; that's all I can say.

Disclaimer: No, I don't own Akira.

That being said, without further yammering…

Scism

Chapter Two

By zapenstap

A splattering of night rain was falling on hot, ash-ridden concrete in a parking lot in the industrial section of Neo Tokoyo. In the middle of the parking lot a heap of debris and trash had been gathered in a pile, soaked with kerosene and lit on fire. The fire burned wild, oblivious to the splatter of soft raindrops, angry flames licking and lashing at the air. The human figures around it appeared only as indistinct shadows, the boys who had started it standing close and the girls maneuvering around them for a spot in the empty space.

Taro Hisaishi watched the fire burn from where he sat on a broken wall on the edge of the scene, just barely in the circle of the fire's light. The front of his dusky face was warmed by the light, but his body was cold. He clutched a faded denim jacket around his shoulders; his arms wrapped around one knee drawn close to his chest, the other dangling over the edge of the wall. He felt the rain

pattering against his head and neck and sleeves, but ignored it. The flames fascinated him, distracting him from his discomfort, but the dark of the night, in the musty coolness, was where he wanted to be. The fire burned bits of cloth, rope, and metal soaked in flammable oil. That was all that was available, but by the way the tongues seemed to leap out of the pile of discarded trash, the flames hungered for wood. Taro thought he might identify with that.

The other boys were crowded closer around the fire, most of them standing, tossing bits of trash into the pile to keep the flames high and the heat hot. There were four of them tonight, not counting the two girls tagging along, a small gang, but there was sometimes as many as eight and they had welcomed him to their group. Despite his early fears, the initiation hadn't been that bad—he'd had worse from Akira—and there had been benefits. Besides, these guys were his friends now. Hell, they were his family. Screw Akira.

"Taro! Are you just going to sit there all night?"

"I'm fine," he called back to Katsu. Katsu was the leader, always looking out for the others and harassing them in turns. No one minded. Everybody deserved their kicks.

Taro propped his dangling foot up on the remains of something that might once have been a microwave and wondered why junk heaps like this one weren't patrolled. This whole district was by the large part abandoned. Taro's gang was just a small thing, a group of drifting, shiftless kids in the same community, but there were others who came out this way that were not so harmless, biker gangs and ravers and a variety of older, more dangerous people to which Taro's group deferred when they made the scene. Maybe the authorities figured that anyone who came here came looking for trouble. That was fine by him.

The kick from the upper he had taken earlier was starting to wind down. He hated winding down. Once reality leveled out, life was just too damn depressing. It was his goal some nights never to wind down until he was somewhere were he could crash indefinitely.

Laughter went up among the group by the fire and Taro noticed Katsu strolling his way.

"Hey," Taro said.

"Hey. You bored?"

"Nah, just… I'm coming."

Katsu roughed up his hair with a hand. "That's my kid," he laughed. "Come on. It's fucking cold over here."

Taro hopped off the ledge and followed, shaking water out of his hair. The rain was starting to let up, just a light sprinkle still falling softly like snow. Now everything just smelled like wet dirt and car oil, the grit of the city. He was so used to it he only noticed it when it rained these days. There was dirt in the rain too, that's why. When they rebuilt Tokyo they built it as fast as they could, sparring no expense, but not wasting time and money to curb pollution. Factories, warehouses, houses, businesses, shopping centers, that was Neo Tokyo, every square inch geared toward stimulating a consumerism economy. They didn't leave any room for parks. The old Tokyo hadn't had much in the way of nature and what was there was destroyed by the bomb. The only nature Taro had ever seen was on television at school. Not that he went to school much anymore.

"Taro, what are you hanging in the dark for?"

Taro smiled shyly at the girl who addressed him in such a bossy manner.

Hana was one of the prettier girls that hung out with the boys on nights like this, and Taro stammered in trying to answer her as she placed her fists on her hips and leveled him with a haughty stare. She was two years older than he was, but more importantly she was *experienced* . He could tell by the vagueness in her eyes that she was tripping on something that was making her more heady than usual. And more aggressive. Whether it was what Katsu had given

him earlier or something stronger, he didn't know. Like most the girls, Hana always wore short skirts, but she accentuated her good points with flat-soled shoes and netted tights that went just above the knee. The exposed skin between the tights and the skirt was tantalizing. In her white tank top, she looked like she should be freezing, but she didn't appear cold.

Taro glanced past her to see Naoko huddled by the fire. Naoko had pretty features, Taro supposed, but he couldn't help but feel a little contemptuous of her beside Hana. She was the only one of the three he really knew at all, because Naoko was almost always the first girl. Naoko's role in the initiation process was the best part about the whole thing, one of the reasons Taro had joined, but now, next to Hana, she looked disheveled and ratty. Her leather shoes had deep creases, her skirt was dirty and she shivered in her t-shirt, arms wrapped around bare legs that seemed bonier than he remembered. Feeling like he deserved it, Taro decided to ignore her.

As Taro turned his attention back to the group, the boys around the fire greeted him lazily. He was offered another hit and he took it without comment, swallowing without the need of water.

"Yeah, Katsu, Taro is definitely getting older!" Hana laughed, reinitiating the conversation that had been interrupted when Katsu went to fetch him. Taro found himself drawn into the light and offered a seat on an overturned milk crate. He wasn't sure whether to feel gratified or uncomfortable at being the topic of conversation until Hana grabbed him by the arm and pressed herself close to him.

"We should be better friends, Taro," she whispered loudly and enticingly into his ear. Her breath tickled, and the hint of the laugh in it rang in his ears like a bell. He felt her shifting and suddenly found his shoulder snug between her breasts and his hand resting on her thigh as she slid close to him.

One of the other gang members, Jiro, snickered. "Taro's just a baby. Aren't you, Taro?"

Taro gritted his teeth angrily. Hell no, he was *not* a baby!

Taro opened his mouth to defend himself, but Katsu spoke up first.

"Enough sitting around. I need to do something."

The effects from the pill he had taken were beginning to affect him. Already he was beginning to feel a little heady. Things looked sharper, clearer, and yet certain realities were beginning to slide at the baseline, like he was looking at a picture through a moving window. His fingers and toes tingled with energy and he blinked to shake away the giddiness rising in his head. He needed to move too. To do something.

"I know somewhere we can go," someone muttered.

Somehow he ended up in the backseat of Katsu's car, though he didn't remember getting in. He did notice Naoko sitting next to him. His hand touched her thigh and slid up and down her leg idly. She let him. She always did, but though she allowed his hand on her leg, she grabbed his arm above the elbow. That was good. She was supposed to give the older guys priority, but his mind fumbled over the subject. By then the car was moving and, distracted by the movement under the influence of the drugs, he forgot about her.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"I'm out of stuff," Katsu muttered. "You took the last and best one. See what I do for you?"

Jiro answered from the front passenger seat. "I think I know where we can get something. You'll have to avoid city center, though. People are supposed to be gathering to protest the new tax laws or something down there. Head for the edge of town. There's that psychiatric ward down by the water…"

"You want to steal drugs from a hospital?" Katsu muttered.

"Why the fuck not? They're under-funded. Low staff. And I need something stronger than this over-the-counter shit. Besides, those people aren't sick, they're just crazy. So maybe they'll be a little crazier, but who the fuck cares?"

"Hey," Katsu warned.

Jiro actually managed to sound contrite. "Sorry, Taro."

"My mom's not that one," Taro muttered, trying to sound disinterested. "Akira would probably have a cow though."

"Who the hell is Akira?" Hana demanded by the other window.

"My older brother," Taro said. He'd forgotten she was there.

"Wait," Jiro laughed. "He's your *older* brother? Kid, you do know that 'Taro's' a name given to a *first* son, right?" Taro's teeth clenched tight.

"Drop it," Katsu muttered. "That's his name."

"My mom's crazy," Taro said with only a little heat in his voice. The implication was noted and further conversation on the matter was dropped. Silence stretched by a minute.

"Hey," Katsu, said. "Check that out."

They hit a stoplight at the corner of town. The rain had let up and people were moving about, catching trains and heading home after movies or a late dinner. On the right, where Katsu was pointing, two girls stood by a restaurant, umbrellas held over their heads. Gorgeous girls.

"So what?" Hana said with a distinctive sneer. "Rich girls. They'd spit as soon as look at you."

Naoko remained silent.

Rich. Yeah. They looked it, down to their open-toed shoes, purses, portable phones and glossy hair. But girls like that didn't spit, if they deigned to notice you at all. They made Hana look like a trashy, over-painted and glossed rag doll. Taro stared at the one nearest the curb, long white legs and tiny feet neatly balanced on three-inch heels. Her hair was a sheet of long, glossy black curls cascading down to her back in fine, rolling waves. It was rare to see a Japanese girl with hair that long these days, much less curled, rare to see anyone so prim and poised and put together. Like a slender vase, expensive, fragile, something that would hold a room together by its very shape and presence. Just beautiful.

"Damn," Jiro muttered.

No one said anything else about them. Girls like that, though...

The spotlight changed to blue and the car rolled on.

Tomiko turned her wrist over to glance at her watch. Only 10:30 and nothing to do.

"What do you want to do now?" Naomi asked. She was always impatient and showed it.

Tomiko never let much of her emotions show on her face. She had been raised to be poised, reserved, an icon of manners and propriety. Still, she smiled at her friend as she tipped her umbrella off of her shoulder. The rain had stopped.

"Well, I don't want to back to my aunt's house. I can't stand her."

"There's a party at Susumu's. You know he'd be glad to have us. I'm sure Nibori will be there. He likes you, right?"

Tomiko scoffed, but turned it into a peal of laughter. She ran a hand through her curls and glanced at her reflection in the window of the restaurant where they had just dined. So beautiful…so often used

and lied to because of it. Tomiko pulled her compact from her purse and opened it to touch up her face. It was a compulsion, her beauty; it was the only thing she had that was really hers. "Him and others," Tomiko told Naomi slyly. The slyness hid contempt, and disappointment, a whole lot of fears and woes she was too much of a coward to face now, not yet. "They all *bore* me these days. So no parties tonight, not for me."

Naomi was petulant, and her lower lip stuck out stubbornly. The girl wanted to throw herself into a man's arms as soon as possible, to drink and carouse and forget her life as her money allowed her to do. Tomiko would have none of it. As soon as she could go back to Kyoto the better, or better yet, her parent's estates in the country. Neo Tokyo was as nauseating as it was oppressive.

Naomi loved it, though. A city girl to her toenails, she enjoyed hard alcohol, rough parties, a dozen suitors and wild weekends. Clubs, bars, house parties, expensive drinks and even more expensive clothes, that was Naomi's style. Tomiko used to like it too. She had been the debutant in her day, a year ago, less. Last winter everybody who was anybody knew her name. Call Tomiko for a good party. She would get the fireworks crackling. But all those drinks and all those men and all those forgotten hours… No more. It was all empty for her now.

"Tomiko, you haven't been out in months. You will never meet anybody if you stay holed up in your house."

"I've met everybody," she said disdainfully. "I'm tired of it."

"You have to get married someday, you know."

Tomiko slammed her compact shut angrily. "No, I don't. Who says so? I don't trust men. I don't want to waste my life petitioning to one to take care of me." She shuddered unconsciously at the thought. If what she had done in the past was any indication of what was necessary to maintain interest…it made her shudder involuntarily, and increased her anger.

"Then you should have fun while you still can. You're the prettiest girl in eight districts. My god, don't waste *that."*

She didn't understand. Tomiko's annoyance made her pick out the weakest thread of that statement and attack it to distract from the real issue. "You don't believe in God."

"So? What do you believe in?"

"I don't know," Tomiko mused. "But I don't believe in Neo Tokyo. People here are animals. Pigs. Come on. I don't want to stand on the street corner like a prostitute."

It was getting late when Akira and Ken reached Akira's tiny apartment in the eighth district. Akira paused by the door that led up the stairs.

"Make any decisions?" Ken asked him.

"No."

"Think Taro will be up there?"

"No."

"Yeah, well..."

Akira shrugged. He didn't want to think too much about it. "I have to get up early for work tomorrow," he told Ken. "It was good to see you though. Good luck with that waitress…Fuyumi?"

Ken laughed. "Yeah."

Car lights distracted them, lighting up the side of the building and Akira's face.

"It's Noa," Akira murmured. At Ken's blank look, he tried to explain. "You've met him before. He's the guy who lives in the Church."

"The one with all the tattoos?"

"Yeah."

The lights dimmed as Noa parked the car. They heard a door slam and watched as an impressive figure approached them from just a few feet away. Noa was a striking six feet, three inches, built like a bull and not an ounce of fat on him. Tattoos ran up and down his arms and back, mostly of crosses, but also of birds and knives and a dozen symbols meaning everything from love to death.

"Hey," Akira called. "I haven't seen you in awhile."

"I've been away. Ken Harold?"

Ken looked surprised. "Yeah, that's right."

"I thought I recognized you." He turned his attention back to Akira. "Hisaishi, have you heard the news? There's rioting downtown. Bunch of students protesting the tax laws, but they've brought the army out to resist them."

"Shit," Ken said. "The army? Are you serious? What are they going to do? Shoot people?"

Noa gave Ken a calm look. He was always calm. When Noa was angry, people got hurt. "They're using gas bombs, but they're carrying clubs, and what's on television looks like a riot. People are going to get killed."

"My God," Akira said. "Taro."

"Don't use the Lord's name in vain, man" Noa warned. "But that's why I came by. I saw Taro earlier. He was with a bunch of kids breaking into a psychiatric ward south by the water, that old, half-abandoned one. With crowbars."

"Shit," Akira said, echoing Ken. "I gotta go get him." He was trying to hold down his anger, but it was starting to boil out. His hands

clenched into fists as he worked his muscles with the effort. "Damn punk."

"I'll give you a ride," Noa said.

"I'm coming too," Ken muttered. "What? Don't look at me like that. It's not like I have anything better to do."

Katsu stood on a stool, digging through a cupboard in the sterilized storeroom of an empty hospital building. The lock they had ripped off with a crowbar. Katsu handed Taro several bottles of pills that might have done anything. Even in his blazed state, Taro wondered what they were for.

"Man, this place really is abandoned," Jiro muttered. No guards. No night-time staff. No patients. The place was empty.

"The drugs are good," Katsu said, turning a bottle around to read the label. "Somebody must still come here."

Taro dumped his bottles on the countertop and swayed on his feet. "I feel kinda ill," he said. "I think I'm gonna pass out."

"Whathefuck?" Jiro said. "Why?"

Katsu turned his head from the cupboard and looked at Taro in surprise. "Hey, you sure you're not okay?"

"I don't know. It's been awhile since I took two hits so close together and I haven't eaten anything today. I'm gonna go sit down."

"Too bad we dropped the girls off," Jiro muttered. "They could take care of you." He laughed.

Katsu snorted.

Taro left the room, thinking maybe a bit of a walk would clear his head a bit. The hallways of this hospital were dark and foreboding,

shadows throwing strange figures across the floor. Maybe gangs other than his had been here because the tiles on the floors were cracked and broken. Large holes had been smashed into the walls. There was trash everywhere. But there were no people. It was like the occupants just vanished. Jiro had said this place was low funded, but not shut down. It was like everyone left this afternoon.

Then he heard a sound. Was that someone crying?

Cautiously, Taro trailed a hand along the wall, following the sound. It intensified as he drew near, an echo of soft, shuddering sobs. Somebody *was crying. It sounded like a girl.*

The trail led him to a closet at the end of the hallway. He stopped, surprised. A closet. Somebody in a closet.

"Hello?" he called, and knocked softly on the door.

The crying stopped. He heard a rustle and stepped back, a little alarmed, but not afraid. Maybe it was the drugs.

"Is somebody in there? Are you okay?"

He realized that the closet was locked from the outside. Who would lock somebody in a closet in an abandoned psychiatric hospital? Perhaps somebody crazy was in there, but maybe somebody crazy had locked somebody in. His mother was crazy, but no one deserved to be abandoned in a closet.

Without much thought on the matter, Taro unlocked and opened the door.

TBC

Review if you want me to work on it! I've got lots of projects going.